

building blocks



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The electronic newsletter of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority
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MSHDA Snags Four New National Awards

At the recent annual convention of the National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA) in New Orleans, three of the six submissions from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) – for “Awards of Excellence” – were selected as worthy of national recognition.

Word of a fourth award, from the Council of State Community Development Agencies, called the Sterling Award for Vibrant Small Cities Initiatives, came at about the same time. The Sterling Award was made

to Michigan and Governor Granholm for a program coordinated out of the MSHDA Community Assistance Team (CATEam).

The NCSHA awards included the Creative Media category entry of the comprehensive media relations program known as “Living in the D” — a multimedia and promotions campaign that included key relationships with two broadcast stations and *Crain’s Detroit Business*. Homewownership’s Graduate Purchase Assistance (GPA) promotional materials for this new initiative to attract recent



MSHDA’s “Awards of Excellence” awarded by the National Council of State Housing Agencies

graduates to purchase homes in targeted Cities of Promise communities was also a winner. The Fraud Prevention Plan and position in

MSHDA’s Office of Housing Vouchers was honored in a special category called Management Innovations and
see Awards of Excellence, page 3



2007 Michigan Downtown Conference Hosted in Traverse City

The weather couldn’t have been any better for this mid-September conference celebrating Michigan downtowns.

Led by MSHDA’s CATEam and several other partner organizations, this year’s conference was designed to

give maximum value to the attendees in both content and community experience.

Because the conference was planned for maximum exposure to the host city, attendees were moving back and forth between two locations. Two

tracks were occurring simultaneously at the elegant Park Place Hotel in downtown Traverse City and the newly remodeled and historically restored City Opera House.

This year, the Michigan

see Downtown Conference, page 3

From the Director's Desk

Gov. Granholm and MSHDA Launch Campaign to “Save the Dream” for Michigan Homeowners

For more than four decades, MSHDA has made the American Dream come true for thousands of Michigan homeowners. Now that dream is being threatened – and not just for homeowners that are facing foreclosure. The future of all Michigan residents is hanging in the balance, due to the epidemic proportions that foreclosures have reached throughout the state. If your neighbor's house goes into foreclosure, that property becomes a blight that disfigures your neighborhood. Cities, towns and villages lose tax revenue that fund education, transportation, police and emergency personnel – just to name some of the services that many of us take for granted. And, as more and more homes are foreclosed on, the problem continues spreading much like a virus that can't be contained.

Right now Michigan ranks fourth in the nation, and predatory lending practices featuring Adjustable Rate Mortgages (ARM) and sub prime loans are largely responsible. Needless to say, our dubious distinction as one of the highest ranking states in foreclosures and our lingering economic troubles here in Michigan have drawn national attention. In October, nationally renowned minister, political activist and civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson came to Michigan to speak



SAVE THE DREAM

A RESPONSE TO
MICHIGAN FORECLOSURES

MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MSHDA has an established network of housing counselors throughout the state that can guide those who are experiencing difficulties through the confusing maze of financial options that exist. Visit our Web site at www.michigan.gov/mshda and click on the “Save the Dream” icon to receive expert help in contacting one of these counselors.

out on behalf of the many disenfranchised and largely minority homeowners facing foreclosure in Michigan. Though he had plenty of sage advice, he had this to say that summarizes the issue quite accurately.

“There is a national crisis as it relates to the number of foreclosures across this country and Michigan is at the forefront largely due to lenders who take advantage of those who are already struggling. We want to put the power back into the hands of the every day citizen who is simply trying to hold on to his or her part of the American Dream.”

Now, MSHDA has the opportunity to “Save the Dream” thanks to legislation recently announced by Governor Granholm. It will allow MSHDA to offer refinancing products for the first time to homeowners who are facing foreclosure.

Though I know we cannot help everyone, I am still extremely thrilled to have the opportunity to help at all. We have to start somewhere and taking that first step is crucial to the recovery of everything that is ailing our struggling economy.

“The Save the Dream” campaign is an enormous

undertaking, and you will be hearing more about it in the coming months. We intend to raise awareness to levels never before achieved here in Michigan – awareness that safe, secure, fixed-rate mortgage loans are the foundation for a strong economy where everyone has a piece of the action ... awareness that MSHDA has been “delivering the dream” for more than 40 years with safe, low-interest mortgages ... awareness that new refinance programs are on the way to “Save the Dream” for many who are struggling to keep up with payments ... and awareness that MSHDA will be here to rebuild the dream with solid, well-established programs that will not only preserve the dream but do it in a way that creates strong, vibrant communities and neighborhoods rooted in powerful economic principles for decades to come.

Author of “The Story Factor” Committed to Homeless Campaign and Summit

Author Annette Simmons, a consummate story teller, took on a role as keynote speaker, weaving her storytelling craft throughout the 2nd annual Michigan Summit on Ending Homelessness.

“The ability to effectively communicate about homelessness and the needs to end it is critically important to every member of the Campaign to End Homelessness,” said Sally Harrison, MSHDA director of the Office of Supportive Housing and Homeless Initiatives. “Whether they are asking for community support, for major funding or for volunteers — this industry has to do a better job at communicating our stories. This is why I was so excited to have Annette Simmons guide us throughout the two-day Summit.”

Simmons was a keynote speaker at the Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing in 2006 and was back by popular demand. She brought copies of her book, “The Story Factor,” so attendees could leave with a reference tool and the motivation to hone their own storytelling craft.

The 2nd annual Michigan Summit on Ending Homelessness also welcomed Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Philip J. Mangano, to encourage Michigan to continue to forge new groups.

Currently, Michigan is the only state that has both a comprehensive state plan and corresponding local plans covering the state’s entire geography.

Awards of Excellence

continued from page 1

received the third award.

Special thanks to Mary Lou Keenon, MSHDA communications director, her marketing team and Donovan & Smith Marketing and Media for their collective roles in designing the Multimedia Campaign, the GPA materials and fine-tuning all of the award submissions.

“There is nothing like being

recognized for excellence,” said MSHDA Executive Director Michael R. DeVos. “But nothing takes the place of being warmly recognized by our peers for good work. Please take the time to acknowledge all of those involved in these key projects and others that might not be on center stage today yet are worthy of our commendation.”

Downtown Conference

continued from page 1

Downtown Conference sported a new logo communicating the excitement and energy of the downtown revitalization movement. Inspired by the logo, the conference also now has a year-round Web site with iconic graphics, a gallery of host city photos and plenty of tools to support registrants, speakers, volunteers and awardees. Within days of the conference ending, a gallery of photos celebrating the Traverse City event was posted along with

many of the speaker presentation notes for quick reference.

To see the Web site, visit www.MichiganDowntownConference.org.

Already, the CATeam and conference committee are working on a request for proposal (RFP) to search out host cities for coming years. Each year, the conference will move to a new city and the planning team will be working to bring value in both session content and post-conference

information as well as an exciting host city experience. “If we choose a host city, we expect that the community is ready to go all-out to welcome our attendees; and in return, we structure our conference for maximum economic impact for [the city] and its downtown,” said Conference Chair and Director of the MSHDA CATeam, Joe Borgstrom.



www.michigandowntownconference.org

The City of Scottville Makes Presentation to Become Main Street Community

The City of Scottville came to MSHDA June 7, presenting their request to the Michigan Main Street Advisory Committee in hopes of becoming a 2007 Michigan Main Street community. As part of their presentation, more than 35 Scottville band members and residents were in attendance including the Scottville Clown Band.

The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage community economic development utilizing the following **four key points**:

- 1. Organization** – getting everyone working toward the same goal, assembling the appropriate human/financial resources to implement a revitalization program
- 2. Promotion** – sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest there
- 3. Design** – getting Main Street into shape, capitalizing on its best assets — such as historic building and pedestrian-oriented streets

4. Economic Restructuring – strengthen existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base

Communities requesting to become a Main Street community make a presentation based on these four key points.

The committee, comprised of community development related organizations throughout the state, includes members of: Michigan Municipal League; Michigan Downtown Association; Michigan Community Development Directors Association; Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries; Main Street Oakland County; Historic Preservation Network; the City of Detroit and the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan.

As a result of their efforts, Scottville was awarded the title of Michigan Main

Street community on July 23.

Scottville will receive five years of intensive technical training assistance through MSHDA, focusing on revitalization strategies designed to attract new business investments and job creation central to its business district.

“Programs like Michigan Main Street go a long way in ... helping revitalize traditional downtowns ... ”

-Michael R. DeVos, Executive Director of MSHDA

“Programs like Michigan Main Street go a long way in not only helping revitalize traditional downtowns, but also in making them a more desirable place to live, work and invest,” said Michael R. DeVos, executive director of MSHDA. “Economic vitality of our vibrant communities and Cool Cities is the cornerstone of continuing economic success for the entire state.”

The Cool Cities Michigan Main Street program is part of Governor Granholm’s efforts to create vibrant communities across the state.

Welcome John Peterson to MSHDA

John Peterson has joined MSHDA as acting director of Multifamily Development.

John is on a six-month contract and is temporarily placed here from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, from July 1, 2007 until December 3, 2007.

As a Michigander originally from Grand Rapids, he now resides in Holland. He received his B.A. from the University of Michigan and his master’s from Grand Valley State University.

As a development specialist, John has been providing financial and development services for the last several years. He has worked with several current MSHDA partners including Trilogy Development, Medallion, Hovey and Hollander, Inc.

Previously, John provided technical assistance for nascent nonprofits providing supportive housing or related services. John has been working with MSHDA for many years to create affordable housing.



So What's the "Good News?"

The good news is: "Now is a great time to buy," says Brad Ward, director of public policy & legislative affairs at the Michigan Association of Realtors. Home prices have come down, so there are some great deals out there. There are also some great homebuyer assistance programs that the Michigan Association of Realtors (MAR) and MSHDA want to make sure first-time home buyers are aware of.

To that end, MSHDA and the MAR have partnered to make the American Dream accessible to as many people as possible. "This really is the mission of the Michigan Association of Realtors, so we find a lot of common ground with MSHDA," says Ward. One of the things MSHDA offers to homebuyers and to members of the MAR is homebuyers counseling to make sure folks are getting into loan products that are right for them.

Last fall, MSHDA offered a series

of two-hour seminars on their various homebuyer assistance programs to the members of the association. "A lot of our members took advantage of that seminar to educate themselves on the various homebuyer programs MSHDA offers. MSHDA also always has someone available for our members to call in order to get questions answered."

In recent years, MSHDA has held workshops at several MAR events. MSHDA conducted a workshop at the association's annual convention held September 26th through the 28th at Soaring Eagle in Mt. Pleasant. This event drew in more than 2,000 realtors from across the state. MSHDA's "American Dream Team" will also be at the Brokers Summit and the MAR's annual Leadership Conference this coming January.

"Mortgage rates are still historically low, so real estate remains a solid long-term investment for the average



person," says Brad Ward of the Michigan Association of Realtors. "And we're very proud to partner with MSHDA to promote better awareness of loan products that are available to first-time homebuyers."

State Leaders Continue Commitment to End Homelessness in Michigan

Officials from state agencies leading Michigan's Campaign to End Homelessness toured Michigan in August and September discussing the Campaign's progress. Local service agencies — along with representatives from MSHDA, Department of Human Services (DHS), Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) and the Department of Community Health (DCH) — toured the eight regions created by the Campaign to End Homelessness sharing progress and

plans with city, township and county affiliates and nonprofit agencies.

Michigan's Campaign to End Homelessness is a nationally recognized model for other states that puts forth goals that state; "The residents of Michigan believe housing is a right, and the elimination of homelessness is an achievable goal. No man, woman or child should be forced to sleep on the streets, in the woods or on a cot in any town or city in Michigan. By standing together, we will provide the poorest

members of our society with housing, services and income supports."

In October of 2006, members from all eight regions of the state convened in Lansing at the first ever Summit on Ending Homelessness. Attendees made their personal pledge to end homelessness. In addition, 60 plans to end homelessness in Michigan were presented covering all 83 counties. These plans outline strategies, timelines and collaboration techniques to end homelessness in Michigan by 2016.



Before



After

GLAR project before and after

GLAR Celebrates Anniversary by Giving Back

When the Greater Lansing Association of Realtors (GLAR) started out 100 years ago this past June, its intention was to encourage cooperation between brokers, enforce ethics in the practice and progress the industry into a new era. Now, a century later, GLAR is still noted as the guardian of the real estate industry in mid-Michigan, but it has picked up a few extra curricular duties along the way; most notably, social responsibility.

GLAR has made community involvement a primary concern throughout its history. So, along with a golf outing and a Grand Ball, it seemed only natural to incorporate a community service initiative into GLAR's centennial celebration. The Curb Appeal Makeover project, born of a partnership with the Greater Lansing Housing Coalition (GLHC), provided that opportunity.

The project called upon area neighborhood associations and realtors to nominate low- to moderate-income homeowners who made outstanding neighbors for an exterior home makeover. After receiving nearly 30 nominations, GLAR and GLHC chose 12 candidates to interview and homes to inspect. From those 12 candidates, the pool was

narrowed down to seven. That's when the problem arose.

"We just couldn't seem to narrow down the final seven candidates," said Mikki Myszak, development director for the GLHC. "They were all such great people and had amazing stories, so we decided to rank order them from one to seven and select that way."

The top three candidates were:

1. **Kindra Jackson** – a single mother of five and Lansing childcare provider;
2. **Simon Ajak** – a mid-20s Sudanese refugee;
3. **Julie Biles** – single mother of three and first-time homeowner.

Each candidate's home received a \$10,000 exterior makeover made possible by a \$30,000 MSHDA grant, hundreds of community volunteer hours, and donations by area businesses, including landscaping by MSU's Landscape Architecture Club.

Curb Appeal volunteer and MSHDA director of community development Rick Ballard, added that the positive group dynamic was indeed what made this project so successful. "Thanks to the contributions and volunteer labor by

all, and GLHC's coordination, we were able to make a major impact for these homeowners at about half the per-unit cost of a typical homeowner rehab project," Ballard said.

And what of the remaining four finalists who did not receive the \$10,000 makeover? After hearing their stories, the founding organizations could not let them walk away empty-handed. The fourth and fifth place finishers received smaller home improvements, and the sixth and seventh place finalists each received \$250 Home Depot gift cards. "There were so many deserving people out there that we just really wanted to help more," Myszak said.

The organizers know that this project will do more than help the seven area homeowners who today are enjoying more beautiful living conditions. It will continue to have far-reaching affects on the community for years to come; an undertaking that MSHDA has always had special investment in.

"It was great to collaborate with the Lansing Realtors in their 100th Anniversary Celebration," Ballard added. "We are especially grateful to the Greater Lansing Housing Coalition for their expert assistance to the Realtors in managing these rehab projects."

“Living in the D” Comes Alive Once Again

On September 20th, the second annual Crain's Ultimate House Party unfolded all over Detroit. The house party, part of the bigger “Living in the D” initiative, was started with the goal of creating a positive buzz about living, working and investing in Detroit.

In 2007, MSHDA's communication department asked media partners in

Detroit to create innovative ways to get the town buzzing. Thus was born Crain's House Party — a mass celebration and invitation-only event that highlights individual neighborhoods and homes. This year, nearly 1,000 people attended 40 different house parties in historic and redeveloped homes around Detroit. Each homeowner gave a tour of their home and spoke about the uniqueness of

their neighborhood. Then, to culminate the evening with a crescendo, party participants gathered at the premiere landmark Detroit skyscraper, Renaissance Center, for a celebration of Detroit and its housing accomplishments. Featured speakers at the event included Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and MSDHA executive director Michael R. DeVos. *Crain's* plans to replicate this event every year.



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Another MSHDA Web Site Goes Live

MSHDA's Michigan Affordable Housing Community Five-Year Action Plan Web site is alive and clicking at www.mshda.info/fyp. Visit the site to stay informed on the latest progress of the five workgroups implementing the Five-Year Plan.

The “Michigan Affordable Housing Community Action Plan: A Five-Year Action Plan for Affordable Housing, Community Development, and Homelessness” was unveiled at the Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing in early May 2006. The goal of the Action Plan is to provide a common vision and voice for affordable housing advocates, funders, practitioners and recipients.

MSHDA's Cities of Promise Web site also continues to fill in nicely. Be sure and stop by CitiesOfPromise.org and check out the latest photo essays highlighting the Strand Building in downtown Muskegon Heights

and the rich cultural heritage of Hamtramck.

The Muskegon Heights photo essay touches on one of the more popular revitalization concepts for the multi-purpose Strand Building, which includes a converted 500-seat theater capable of handling live performances, newly remodeled space for retail shops and offices on the first floor along Broadway, and spacious apartments on the second and third floors.

The Hamtramck photo essay showcases the city's cultural diversity and Polish heritage. There are dozens of different ethnic groups living in Hamtramck, making it one of the most diverse communities in America.

Check out the before photos of the Strand Building and the vibrant municipality that is Hamtramck in the Photo Essays section at CitiesOfPromise.org.



www.mshda.info/fyp



www.citiesofpromise.org